

	REBECCA		DAVID		
	AB - HAYET-MIM*				
EDGAR (ZAR)	→ M.	ESTHER	BIGIO	→	4c
DAVID	→ M.	ABRAHAM	BIGIO	→	3c
ELIMIN (ASOUB)	→ M.	FELICITÉ	TOTAH	→	4c
EMILY*	→ M.	SHAROL	SHAMI	→	2c
ROBERT*	→ M.	RAFAEL	HORN	→	6c
VICTOR*	→ M.	ALICE	LINARO	→	4c
REBECCA	→ M.	JOSEPH	COHEN	→	5c
ALFRED	→ M.	KAROUN	DEBAL	→	3c
MARSHOT	→ M.	RAFAEL	NEHMAN	→	4c
EDMOND	→ M.	(1) SUZETTE	MES	→	3c
		(2) NINON		→	1c

* = deceased

M = Married

c = children

The Jews of Calcutta – the living tradition

a project by Norman Track

The Jews of Calcutta have an interesting history spanning almost 200 years. This Sephardi community stems mainly from the 19th century diaspora of Baghdadi Jews. Today, the aging Jewish population of Calcutta numbers around 100, if the present trend continues, in less than 20 years they will be but a memory.

Four books have been written about the Jews of Calcutta (*Origin and History of the Calcutta Jews*, I.S. Abraham, 1969; *The Jews of Calcutta*, F. Elias & J.F. Cooper, 1974; *On the Banks of the Ganga: The Sojourn of Jews in Calcutta*, E.N. Musleah, 1975; *Turning Back the Pages: A Chronicle*

of Calcutta Jewry, E.D. Ezra, 1986). All are authored by members of the community and deal chiefly with the overall history of the community, specific families, people and personal reminiscences. An important aspect which has not been considered is what was the religious and secular life of the Baghdadi Jews, how was this tempered during their time in Calcutta and what of this has travelled to the present day communities of Calcutta Jews in London, Los Angeles and Sydney. This aspect is the subject of the present project.

In addition, this project will provide an opportunity to expand the knowledge and

understanding of traditional Sephardi religious (circumcision/baby naming; *mifun*, *bar mitzvah*; engagement; wedding; funeral) and secular (superstition, food) practices compared to Ashkenazi. None of the publications about the Calcutta Jews has systematically explored these topics.

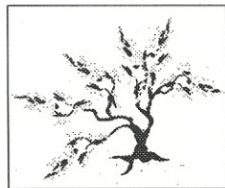
★★★

During three visits to Calcutta (1988, 1989), I interviewed and photographed a number of the resident Jewish population as well as photographing the three synagogues, an assortment of religious objects, the two cemeteries, and a funeral. In London and Los Angeles, I also interviewed a number of Jews from Calcutta and Baghdad.

★★★

During a recent visit to Calcutta, I had the opportunity to meet General J. Jacob. The general produced a Hebrew book outlining superstitious beliefs that his great grandmother had brought from Baghdad. It appears that superstition played an important role in the daily lives of the Baghdadi and Calcutta Jews. In Los Angeles, Rabbi Ben Zaquen and his colleagues are studying portions of this book that I photographed to determine its historical relevance.

With this new compilation of both common and unique practices of the Baghdadi and Calcutta religious and secular lives, it will be possible to establish which of them still survive in the contemporary communities of Calcutta Jews in London, Los Angeles, and Sydney. In order to make this data readily available to a wide audience, I propose to publish this information with a selection of archival and present-day photographs.



Parts from Article by Norman Track, entitled *The Jews of Calcutta - The Living Tradition*.

נורמן טרק כותב על ירושת כלכותא.

